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ABSTRACT

The definition of coalition offered here is "a group of organizations or individuals, often with diverse interests, who come together to achieve a common purpose or deal with a common issue." The author begins by looking at some current coalitions with interests in education such as the Committee for Education Funding or the National Coalition for Public Education. He then suggests that educators ought to consider forming coalitions of community people to promote high quality education locally and in every state. Steps for forming a coalition are listed and discussed, including choosing specific issues to confront, identifying those affected by the issues, convening a meeting, and selecting a chairperson. Guidelines for successful coalitions are offered. Members must (1) be committed, (2) have knowledge of the subject, (3) be able to develop effective strategies, (4) develop a communications network, (5) be positive rather than defensive about the schools, (6) keep community, staff, and board informed, (7) achieve consensus, (8) allow some diversity of objectives among themselves, (9) use the art of negotiation, and (10) be willing to share the glory. Seven problems that may be encountered are listed, including domination by one member, jealousies between members, conflicting goals, and arguments over strategy. The author concludes that the right kind of coalitions can help educators find a common purpose for schools and communities. (JM)

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TITLE OF YOUR CONVENTION PROGRAM Building Support Through Successful Coalitions

DAY YOU WILL PRESENT YOUR PROGRAM Saturday, February 26, 1983
(Day of Week) (Date)

TIME OF DAY YOU WILL PRESENT YOUR PROGRAM 11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

YOUR NAME Gary Marx

YOUR TITLE Associate Executive Director

NAME OF YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT/ORGANIZATION American Association of School Administrators

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Building Support Through Successful Coalitions
Gary Marx
AASA Convention, Atlantic City
Room 320, Convention Hall
11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
Saturday, February 26, 1983

After 200 years, out nation is still learning about democracy. The words are there to describe it. But some of us have a hard time dealing with it. The idea of democracy isn't new. The great Greek philosopher, Pericles said... "In a democracy...the administration is in the hands of the many, not of the few." Pericles, as you know, is known as the father of democracy. Abraham Lincoln and other have said that we are a government "of the people...by the people...and for the people." Emblazoned over the rostrum in the U.S. Senate Chamber and neatly printed on our currency is the motto..."E Pluribus Unum".. of the many...one.

Why is it then...that we have such difficulty with the concept of democracy? Why do we fear team management? Why do we, as leaders, sometimes hesitate to involve people in the decisions which affect them? The most common answers to that question are:

. When others get involved, I feel like I'm losing control.
. I've worked a long time to get the power I have now and I don't intend to give it up.
. I'm not sure those other people are smart enough to handle it...and what if they have ideas that run counter to mine?

If we truly believe in democracy...then we believe that power shared is power multiplied...in the common good. As top educational leaders...we must be driven by the common good. We must be sure the institutions we represent operate in the public interest...that they are democratic institutions...of the people, by the people and for the people.

Most political scientists tell us there are basically two main classes of government, totalitarian or authoritarian...and free and responsible.

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In a totalitarian regime, there are few, if any aspects of life over which the people have power. The citizen exists for the state. Carried to its ultimate degree...the absolute monarch may even claim that his or her power has been give personally by God. That relieves the leader of any responsibility to those people who populate the country. A less extreme but equally restricting for of totalitarianism is ideological totalitarianism. The country might have a written constitution. It may even have a bill of rights, but the leader is driven by an ideology, sometimes so intense that the leader surrounds himself with only "Yes" people. The people of the country have great difficulty in holding the government responsible for its actions in such a regime.

Then, there is our noble experiment drawn from the genius of people like Voltaire and Thomas Jefferson of free and responsible government. Most free and responsible governments rest on one basic philosophy. That is that the state exists for the citizen...not the citizen for the state. There are free elections, and the civil rights of citizens are not only guaranteed by law, they are enforceable in the courts.

The great challenge of government in a free and democratic society is in maintaining a consensus among the people. How do you do that? That's what we're going to discuss today, at least one aspect of it...building coalitions. After all, what is a state or a nation in a free society...but a coalition of people.

Whenever an organization forms, it attempts to put together policies and programs that will serve the greatest number of people possible. If that organization is a school system, then in developing its policies, its mission statement, its goals and its programs, it must consider: the needs of the community; the desires of a representative board; the broader role of the institution in society, such as its contribution to economic well being and national security; and the professional knowledge educational leaders have

about how people learn and how organizations operate. Those policies and programs will also reflect reactions to policies and programs already in place...as part of the whole process of renewal.

Renewal is essential. Why? For one thing, the pluralistic nature of a community changes. If you've been working as an administrator in communities such as Dade County, Florida, or Houston, Texas, those changes have been dramatic in the past ten years.

The fact is that the policies and programs that were perfect ten years ago may not hold water today. Therefore, the school system that builds a line of defense to maintain the status quo...that refuses to change...that insists on policies and programs people may not feel are in their best interests, may be headed for trouble.

The common good is a relative matter. It changes as the community changes. And so, alas, must we.

The master politician is a person who can maintain a consensus with the community...a person who can rally people around ideas...a person who can listen, respond to need and lead beyond responsiveness...even legitimately inspire. Maintaining a concensus with the community is one of the great challenges we face if hope hope to sustain high quality educational programs for our students.

There are basically four steps in the communications management process: research, plan, communicate and evaluate. Coalitions can help us with all four of those steps. Therefore the ability to build and maintain coalitions seems to me a realistic expectation of anyone in public administration since the legitimacy of our institution is closely tied to communication with those we are intended to serve.

What is a coalition? Here is my definition: "A coalition is a group of organizations or individuals, often with diverse interests, who come together to achieve a common purpose or deal with a common issue."

With that definition in mind, let's take a look at some current coalition efforts:

- Committee for Education Funding. This group is made up not just of educational organizations, but includes other organizations as well...organizations which depend, at least in part, on the federal government for financial support. They have decided not to fight each other...to be divided and conquered... but to rally for full funding for all autnorized programs...as specified in the law. Too often, as you know, a requirement is put in place, but the funding doesn't follow.
- National Coalition for Public Education. These fairly divergent groups are taking on the issue of tuition tax credits.
- The Title I Coalition. Of course, these groups have banded together to try to assure high quality education for the disadvantaged through Chapter 1.
- The Forum of Education Organization Leaders. Made up of 11 major national teacher, administrator, board and parent organizations, often with divergent viewpoints on various issues. However, these groups have a common interest in education. Therefore, they seek those issues and concerns that they have in common. These groups may not follow one course of action, but might, in some cases, take specific actions that fit the needs of each organization's individual membership. The Forum has adopted six objectives for building confidence in our schools and has recently adopted a national theme for American education. The theme..."Public Education...A Sound Investment In America."
- State Coalitions have been formed in a number of states to support high quality education. A few of those states are: California, Minnesota, Kansas and Florida. Indiana is in the process of pulling together a coalition for the schools.

. Local School districts have brought people together in coalitions efforts through pursuing school-business partnerships and through the community education process. More and more, people from the community are being involved. More and more, citizens are gaining an understanding that a sound system of education is the very foundation of a great community.

. The Business Roundtable is, in some respects, a coalition of divergent business leaders, who look out for the interests of business.

. Nations form coalition governments. Why? Because when one group is left out, the domestic tranquility is threatened, if for not other reason.

As educators, we are drawn into coalitions to deal with industrial growth, how people feel about business, how to deal with drug/alcohol abuse, transportatic concerns, tax issues. How about forming coalitions for America's most important enterprise, the enterprise that provides the people who make the wheels of industry turn...education? I urge you to consider forming coalitions for high quality education...locally...in every state...and in our nation. Let me, for sake of discussion, suggest the following types of coalitions:

. A Coalition for High Quality Education. This type of coalition could draw together representatives from the many groups in the community which benefit from quality schools. The coalition might work to build an awareness of the importance of high quality education to the future of the community, and might even suggest the roles parents, non-parent taxpayers, business people and government leaders might have to play in assuring the best possible schools for the community. And that might be a star to follow..."We are going to have the best school system in the nation, right here in our communit) If enough people from diverse enough interest can agree to that, wild horses won't stand in your way.

. A Coalition for a Better (your community). Here the scope is broader. Educators might be the catalysts in pulling this type of coalition together. However, the coalition would focus on the business climate, the quality of life. The school system is then seen in the context of total community betterment. It doesn't take long for people from all walks of life to see that an investment in education is essential to a sound community. People begin to see that education is an essential part of every community endeavor not as an organization that swallows a lot of tax money. A coalition of this type might also help people understand the great heritage of their community. You can help to show that the schools have been a vital part of that heritage.

With that framework, let's discuss the steps in actually forming a coalition.

1. Explore the issues in your community. Which issue or issues do you want to confront? Getting education back on your community's agenda? Building support for high quality education?
2. Identify the groups in your community or your state who are, whether they realize it or not, affected by the issue. Those groups are certainly diverse and might include: parents, non-parent taxpayers, the business community, elected leaders, the university community, labor union representatives, and others.
3. Convene a meeting. Set an agenda and a time limit. State the purpose you see for the coalition. Ask the group to reach consensus on a statement of purpose...a mission statement. And ask them for a commitment to particip Have a prominent or respected person give perspective to the issue. Perhaps you could serve as chairperson at the first meeting. Perhaps an outside person would handle that responsibility from the outset. Try to avoid the impression that the coalition is self serving. It is, in reality, there to serve a cause that is beneficial to the community.

4. Select a Chairperson. Beyond your first meeting, someone must be in charge. That person must have the time and energy and the enthusiasm for the cause and be willing to do the job. The leader might be a person from the group that has the most to win or lose. Or just the opposite...it might be a neutral party who displays "no vested interest."

These are initial steps.

Now let's explore some guidelines for successful coalitions.

1. The members of the coalition must be committed to work in the common good... not just in their own self interest. They must see the big picture.
2. The members must have knowledge of the subject. Therefore, information sessions may be needed to sharpen the issues. In the case of education, you might have much of the information that is needed. Others might bring new perspectives.
3. Members must be able to develop strategies for dealing with issues.
4. A communications network must be established to keep coalition members informed and to seek their ideas.
5. The coalition should be placed in a positive framework. Maintain the offensive without being offensive. Try to avoid getting stuck in a defensive position. Keep in mind that it does little good to defend the past. You can't improve the past. But you can make the present and future even brighter. Avoid allowing the coalition meetings to become gripe session Be constructive.
6. Keep you community and staff informed of the activity. Remember, effective public relations works from the inside out. And whenever possible, seek their ideas so they can feel ownership in the cooperative spirit. Spirit is a key word.
7. Let the board know what is happening. Let the board know you will need the latitude to speak for the schools in a broad community context. Most of you

feel tha is an essential part of your jobs anyway. You regularly explore issues such as the educational implications of industrial development, for example. If any organization has to "go back to the board" for every decision, the meetings lose their vitality. However, it goes without saying that issues that go beyond policy, where deep controversy exists or where extensive budget implications arise, should be shared with the board. You may even survey staff members on some issues to broaden your knowledge base and expand ownership.

8. If there is disagreement within the coalition, try to modify the pronouncemen or the suggested strategy...by consensus. Try to avoid voting. Small differences...if unresolved...can destroy big ideas. If an organization want to support the big idea but not sign off on all items, that's OK. Perhaps the consensus statement can be narrowed a bit. Perhaps a better word can be found. Perhaps not all groups will undertake certain strategies with the same vigor.

9. Don't insist that all groups pursue the objectives of the coalition in the same way. They have divergent constituencies. There are things, however, like community wide themes, public service announcements, community celebrati and so on can involve everyone and can help to bring us together as a communi

10. Be willing to give something up for the common good. Us the art of negotiati Look for common denominators...areas of agreement. Don't demand that others follow your point of view. It's OK to try to persuade them. But be willing to bend. I would venture to say that you will know when you can compromise no further.

11. Be willing to share the glory. If you are working in a community endeavor with other organizations, give the coalition some credit. With a little bit of luck, the sun will shine on everyone.

What are the problems you might encounter in establishing a successful coalition?

1. Domination by one member. When the big organization tries to overwhelm the smaller ones...or when one person tries to dominate others...progress falters. Trust wanes.
2. Jealousies between members. That's not uncommon, and you'll probably confront it until all groups and individuals can see there is something in it for them. All organizations bring their "self interests" with them.
3. Conflicting goals. Your pronouncements should be consensus statements. All must buy in to the basic directions of the group. Otherwise, other directions should be considered.
4. Arguments over strategy. Each group might think it has the right way. Work toward consensus. Avoid voting.
5. If the organization is too formal, that can become a problem. Don't expect blind loyalty to the coalition. Each group has a constituency or a market it must serve. Respect that.
6. Holding too many meetings. Use time wisely and hold meetings only when you have something to meet about. Set up a minimum meeting schedule for the year. Then add meetings to that schedule if needed.
7. Lack of follow through. If work is to be done, get it done. Otherwise, members of the coalition will say they are wasting their time.

Let me remind you that coalitions exist or are being formed to cut taxes, to pull books from your libraries, to promote tax credits...the list goes on. We can roll over and play dead or we can take the initiative. Forming a coalitio is taking the initiative in a big way. You are the catalyst. You are the one who can get the ball rolling. You are the one who can take positive initiatives.

We live in a rich nation. Our richness is not limited to economics. The real richness of our society is in its diversity. We value our right to be different. A 1981 survey by Civic Service, Incorporated, found that when people were asked "What are you proudest of about America? Just tell me briefly in your own words."...71 percent said "freedom and liberty." Number two was "the opportunity to be an individual." We are a nation founded on diversity. As public administrators, as educational leaders, as leaders in our communities, our job is not to restrict that diversity, but to manage it...to blend it into a community, into a state, into a nation, that supports high quality education.

Diversity, if not properly managed, can divide. Take a look at the riots of the 60s, the deprivation of blacks and other minorities, the confusion over how to deal with immigrants who have joined us here in this great land. Take a look at the generations of handicapped people who needed our concern.

Sometimes, what we can't manage, we isolate. Laws and programs favor one group at the expense of another. Ghettos develop. The fact is that what we don't know about sub cultures...what we don't know about what other people think...can hurt all of us. Awhile back, I attended a First Amendment conference One speaker, a television preacher said, "The Blacks and the Jews can just be hap we allow <u>them</u> to live in <u>our</u> country." Let's not forget "E Pluribus Unum."

Diversity, if properly managed, can enrich. What a thrill to be a part of a community that attempts to explore all points of view in making decisions. Wha an exciting thing it is to see multitudes of people at a folklife festival. What inspiration...what deep down inspiration there is...in seeing people of various ethnic groups, social and economic conditions and educational levels, including the handicapped, come together to explore...and to emphasize...what they have in common. Our unity is based on what we have in common. It is also based on a common appreciation for our diversity.

I believe the right kind of coalitions can help us find a common purpose for our schools and for our communities. There was a time when the purpose for our schools was clear. That purpose was to provide the immigrants with the language and understanding of history plus the other skills and knowledge they needed to become participants in the life of this new nation. Today, that purpose is less clear. We need to rediscover and come to agreement on a common purpose for education in our communities...a purpose that all can adopt and support. Coalitions can help.

Coalitions are not a panacea, but they provide one step in the process of rediscovering that common purpose for our schools and for our communities. These are some of the questions your coalition might answer:

. If we want a great community, what role must the schools play?
. If we want a sound business climate, what role must the school play?
. If we want great schools, what role must the business community, labor leaders, non-parent taxpayers, parents and others play?

I urge you to study the possibilities in coalition building. Bringing people together in common purpose is an act of leadership. You are the leader. As Paul Salmon said last year, if you've been waiting for someone else to take the initiative, wait no longer. You are now the leader. Look no further. You are the one!